

[illegible]

Claims

- [c1] 1. An online method for advising a customer on service needs and facilitating the scheduling of a vehicle service appointment, the method comprising: receiving a service inquiry wherein the service inquiry is selected from the group comprising: a service request, a scheduled maintenance request, and a recall request; receiving input information regarding the potential service of the vehicle wherein if the service inquiry is a service request, the input information includes information defining vehicle symptoms pertinent to the service request or if the service inquiry is the scheduled maintenance request or the recall request, the input information includes a vehicle identification number or the vehicle make, vehicle model year, and vehicle model wherein the input information is used to determine whether service is advised for the vehicle; and transmitting the input information and an appointment request to a vehicle service provider to facilitate the scheduling of the vehicle service appointment.
- [c2] 2. The online method of claim 1 wherein the service inquiry is the service request and wherein the input information defining vehicle symptoms pertinent to the service request includes a vehicle symptom string.
- [c3] 3. The online method of claim 2 further comprising determining an at least two symptom probing questions based on the vehicle symptom string.
- [c4] 4. The online method of claim 3 further comprising transmitting to the customer the at least two symptom probing questions.
- [c5] 5. The online method of claim 4 further comprising transmitting to the vehicle service provider the answers to the at least two symptom probing questions.
- [c6] 6. The online method of claim 1 wherein the service inquiry is selected by the customer.
- [c7] 7. The online method of claim 1 further comprising receiving available appointment dates and arrival times from the vehicle service provider.
- [c8] 8. The online method of claim 1 wherein the service inquiry is the vehicle

maintenance request and further comprising retrieving a vehicle maintenance schedule for the vehicle based on the input information.

[c9] 9. The online method of claim 1 wherein the service inquiry is the recall request and further comprising determining whether a recall exists for the customer's vehicle based on the input information.

[c10] 10. The online method of claim 1 further comprising transmitting to the customer the input information to the customer prior to transmitting the input information and the appointment request.

[c11] 11. An online vehicle service method comprising:
receiving a service inquiry wherein the service inquiry is selected from the group comprising: a service request, a scheduled maintenance request, a recall request, and a vehicle status request;
receiving input information regarding the potential service of the vehicle wherein if the service inquiry is a service request, the input information includes information defining vehicle symptoms pertinent to the service request or if the service inquiry is the scheduled maintenance request or the recall request, the input information includes a vehicle identification number or the vehicle make, vehicle model year, and vehicle model wherein the input information is used to determine whether service is advised for the vehicle or if the service inquiry is the vehicle status request, the input information includes an at least last name of a customer checking on the vehicle status wherein the input information is used to determine the vehicle status; and
transmitting the input information and an appointment request to a vehicle service provider to facilitate the scheduling of the vehicle service appointment.

[c12] 12. The online method of claim 11 wherein the service inquiry is the vehicle status request and further comprising receiving vehicle status information from the vehicle service provider.

[c13] 13. The online method of claim 12 further comprising transmitting to the customer vehicle status information.

[c14] 14. An online system for advising a customer on service needs and facilitating

the scheduling of a vehicle service appointment, the system comprising at least one server computer operably serving at least one client computer, the at least one server computer configured to:

- (i) receive a service inquiry wherein the service inquiry is selected from the group comprising: a service request, a scheduled maintenance request, and a recall request;
- (ii) receive input information regarding the potential service of the vehicle wherein if the service inquiry is a service request, the input information includes information defining vehicle symptoms pertinent to the service request or if the service inquiry is the scheduled maintenance request or the recall request, the input information includes a vehicle identification number or the vehicle make, vehicle model year, and vehicle model wherein the input information is used to determine whether service is advised for the vehicle; and
- (iii) transmit the input information and an appointment request to a vehicle service provider to facilitate the scheduling of the vehicle service appointment.

[c15] 15. The online system of claim 14 wherein the at least one server computer is additionally configured to receive available appointment dates and arrival times from the vehicle service provider.

[c16] 16. The online system of claim 15 wherein the at least one server computer is additionally configured to transmit a request XML package containing a request for available appointment dates and arrival times to the vehicle service provider and to receive a response XML package containing available appointment dates and arrival times.

[c17] 17. The online system of claim 16 wherein the at least one server computer is additionally configured to transmit a request XML package containing the appointment date and arrival time for the vehicle service appointment to a dealer server or dealer middleware server and to receive a response XML confirming the appointment date and arrival time.

[c18] 18. The online method of claim 14 wherein the service inquiry is the service request and wherein the input information defining vehicle symptoms pertinent to the service request includes a vehicle symptom string.

[c20] 20. The online method of claim 19 further comprising transmitting to the customer an at least two symptom probing questions.